

# O'Neill keen on championship hurling in the US

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*by Brian Murphy*

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Liam O'Neill

Uachtarán CLG Liam Ó Néill believes a major inter-county hurling championship game will be played in the US in the 'not-too-distant future'.

The Uachtarán, who has just returned from a trip to Buffalo in New York, says the awareness of Gaelic Games outside the huge Irish community in the US is growing but the key to ensuring mainstream recognition for hurling and football lies with building a television audience there first.

While the Uachtarán wasn't sure of exactly when it might happen, he said the idea of household names in Ireland such as Joe Canning or Tommy Walsh lining out for their county in a major championship game on US soil in the future is not too fanciful.

“I’m not so sure of the timescale on that, but I am quite sure it will happen,” said the Uachtarán at [the launch of the partnership between the Irish Blood Transfusion Board and the GAA](#) on Tuesday. “I’m quite sure it will happen at some stage.



“I think first of all we have to build the audience through television and get an awareness outside of the Irish community.

“Americans love sport. They love quality sport and any of them that see hurling or Gaelic football will really go for it.

“Our big challenge now is to get our games on TV or whatever platform we can so there is an awareness built up of the games.

“I don’t see it in the immediate future but certainly what I have outlined is a runner in the not-too-distant future.”

The idea is not entirely novel as the 1947 All-Ireland football final between Kerry and Cavan was famously played at the Polo Grounds in New York , while Gaelic Park in the Bronx hosts New York ’s Connacht Senior Football Championship games.

However, in the 129-year history of the GAA, a senior inter-county hurling championship match has never been played in North America .

The GAA and Croke Park will host big-time American College Football at Croke Park this summer when University of Central Florida host Penn State in their 2014 Season Opener on August 30.

The first steps towards bringing hurling to a the wider US audience were taken by the GAA last year, [when Munster played Leinster in a game of Super 11s hurling](#) – a unique short form of hurling designed by the GAA and the GPA to introduce the game to a new audience - at Notre Dame University.

Played on the famed Indiana University 's lacrosse pitch at the Arlotta Stadium on the same day that 100,000 American football fans were on the South Bend campus, the game was met with great enthusiasm by fans of the 'Fighting Irish' and the experiment was deemed a big success.



“That was Donal Óg Cusack’s initiative and we are going to discuss how we might develop that,” Ó Néill added.

“The beauty of the Super 11s is that it’s a game where the ball is propelled on the ground, low and only for goals.

“It’s also a game that can be played in an urban setting because you won’t see the ball skied outside boundaries, so it has huge possibilities, I think.

“If we relied totally on the 15-a-side game to develop hurling abroad it won’t fit every time and we have to be open to change and to reflect that.”

Just back from his trip to Buffalo, located on the shores of Lake Erie in western New York State, where he attended a business forum aimed at attracting local companies to consider doing business with Ireland and visited the Buffalo Fenians GAA Club, Ó Néill witnessed first hand GAA clubs establishing genuine roots in the communities.

Thanks to Dean Mutua for the warm welcome to Liam O Neill, GAA President & Deputy Consul General Ryan this morning. [pic.twitter.com/VfsjBX0kaR](https://pic.twitter.com/VfsjBX0kaR)

— Irish Consulate NYC (@IrelandinNY) [January 9, 2014](#)

“What came across to me clearly was that there is a huge capacity for GAA clubs in North America to expand,” he said.

“The more far-seeing clubs are looking to set up juvenile programmes – youth programmes they call them – and to expand their activity.

“What we would love to see is for the clubs who bring over players from Ireland for the weekends to bolster themselves to recede into the background, and for the clubs that are building from the bottom up to come to the fore.

“I stopped in on the way through New York and visited Shannon Gaels, who were launching a campaign to develop their facilities in Frank Golden Park, and they are recognised by the borough of Queen’s as being worthy of being given a public park to put two pitches on.

“I said before it would be the equivalent of Dublin City Council giving Stephen’s Green or Merrion Square to any club here. It’s unheard of and it just shows you the level of appreciation of the youth work being done.

“We already have very well-established centres in New York , Chicago , Boston and San Francisco , but now there are pitch and clubhouse (building) programmes going on in Philadelphia , Cleveland , Pittsburgh and Buffalo .

“There is a huge upsurge in the power of the GAA units there to put down roots. When you buy a field and start to develop it you are serious about your business and I am delighted to see that happening in North America .”